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Objectivity and Evaluation

I this article, I introduce the notion of *pluralism* about an area, and use it to argue that the questions at the center of our normative lives are not settled by the facts -- even the normative facts. One upshot of the discussion is that the concepts of realism and objectivity, which are widely identified, are actually in tension. Another is that the concept of objectivity, not realism, should take center stage.

The Parallel Postulate

Suppose that you pass two straight lines through another, and on one side of the latter the angles that the two lines make with the it is less than 180°. Must the two lines intersect? This is the Parallel Postulate question. We could understand it as a question about physical spacetime, in which case the answer is evidently either "yes" or "no". But suppose we understand it as one of pure mathematics, like that of whether there are infinitely-many twin primes. Is it true then?

The question is patently misconceived. In a sense, it has no objective answer -- even assuming that it has a mind-and-language independent one. There are different geometries, each consistent

if the other are, and these give different answers to the Parallel Postulate question. In Euclidean

geometry the answer "yes" while in, e.g., hyperbolic geometry the answer is "no". All we would

learn in answering the Parallel Postulate question is something about us. We would just learn

what geometrical structures we were talking about (or what was "packed into" the geometrical

concepts we happened to be employing), rather than learning which such structures there were.

To be sure, we could make the question sound metaphysical. If we wonder whether we happen

to be referring to Euclidean lines or hyperbolic lines with the word "lines", then, by semantically

descending, we can wonder whether the lines *really are* Euclidean or hyperbolic. But that is a

boring question if ever there were one! We could avoid it altogether by simply *stipulating* that

by "lines" we will hereby mean, e.g., Euclidean lines. Indeed, this is what we actually do.[1]

Metaphysical Pluralism

Such a view of geometry is hardly controversial. Indeed, it is even independent of the

realism-antirealism debate in the philosophy of mathematics. Even a mathematical platonist

would agree that different geometries are equally true of their intended subjects. But one could,

in principle, take an analogous perspective on other areas of mathematics, including

"non-algebraic" ones, like set theory (Balaguer [1998], Field [1998], Hamkins [2012], Linsky

and Zalta [1995]).

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[1] It is also true that an eccentric metaphysician could add that some one geometry, in addition to being true, is somehow metaphysically privileged. But notwithstanding the fact that, to my knowledge, such a view would be unprecedented (even in philosophy!), any reason to metaphysically privilege some one geometry over all others would seem to be equally a reason to regard only it as true.

Let us define *pluralism* about an area, F, as the view that there are a plurality of F-like concepts, all equally satisfied, independent of human minds and languages. Then there is a case to be made that pluralism is the most viable form of realism about set theory, (counterfactual) possibility, logic, mereology, essence, the theory of grounding, and much more.[2] Just as we have different concepts of point and line, all equally satisfied, we have well-founded and non-well-founded concepts of set, physical, metaphysical, and logical concepts of possibility, classical, intuitionistic, and paraconsistent concepts of consequence, and so on. Such questions as "is the Axiom of Choice true?", "could you have had different parents?", "does anything follow from a contradiction?", and "is the grounding relation transitive?" are analogous to the Parallel Postulate question.

What is the argument for such a general pluralism? If "monism" about set theory, modality, logic, grounding, and so forth were true, then it would be a mystery how we could have significant knowledge of the areas.[3] For example, even if we are actually convinced that every set is well-founded, that every set has a Choice function, and that the Continuum Hypothesis fails, it certainly seems that we could have easily believed otherwise. It is not as if we would have arrived at a contradiction on the basis of alternative principles (assuming that we cannot derive a contradiction from the principles we actually accept). As Hamkins writes, we could have easily

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[2] See my [2015], [Forthcoming A], [Forthcoming B], and [Forthcoming C] for details.
[3] Another argument is that "monism" about, e.g., (counterfactual) possibility would seem to be hardly more principled than monism about (pure) geometry. It is not as if we cannot make sense of, say, logical possibility along with metaphysical possibility. Such questions as how the world would have been different had you -- yes, you! -- had different parents are already studied under the heading "impossible worlds" (Berto [2013]). But a believer in a more inclusive class of possible worlds (or in more inclusive notion of possibility) differs only verbally from a believer in impossible worlds.

look[ed] upon models of ~PSA [which says that it is not the case that $|x| < |y| \rightarrow 2^x < 2^y$] as strange in some fundamental way, violating a basic intuitive principle of sets concerning the relative sizes of power sets; perhaps our reaction to these models would be like the current reaction some mathematicians (not all) have to models of ZF+~AC or to models of Aczel's anti-foundation axiom AFA, namely, the view that the models may be interesting mathematically and useful for a purpose, but ultimately they violate a basic principle of sets [2011, 19].

In epistemological parlance, our set-theoretic beliefs would fail to be *safe* if set-theoretic monism were true. That is, it would be the case that we could have easily had systematically false ones (using the method that we actually used to form ours). The problem is not that the set-theoretic truths could have easily been different. The problem is that our beliefs could have easily been.

On the other hand, if set-theoretic pluralism is true, then the epistemology of set theory is like the epistemology of (pure) geometry. Had we accepted, say, the negation of the Axiom of Choice, there still would have been a universe of sets to which it corresponded. The iterative universe of sets can sit "side by side" all manner of other set-like universes (Field [1998]). Although Carnap would be wrong to suggest that we can *generate* set-theoretic reality by specifying set-theoretic principles, he would be right to remark that "the conflict between the divergent points of view… disappears… [B]efore us lies the boundless ocean of unlimited possibilities" [1937/2001, XV].[4]

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[4] Compare Field [2005, 78]:,

Pluralism and Deflation

Whether pluralism is true of any of the above areas is, of course, controversial. In order to fill the picture out, we would need to specify a criterion for being an area, F, with respect to which pluralism is true, as well as a criterion for being an *F-like* theory. The first step is required because presumably we do not wish to be pluralists about the physical universe! The second is required because it would be of little help, epistemically speaking, to postulate only, say, the iterative universe of sets and that of Azcel [1988, Part I]. This would still leave an advocate of, say, Quine [1937] with false set-theoretic beliefs, and with no apparent method by which to discover this.

What will be important below is not whether pluralism is true, however, but that it would have deflationary methodological ramifications *if it were true*. Or, if one is uneasy counterfactually conditionalizing on pluralism's truth,[5] it suffices to note that, *under the assumption of F-pluralism*, F-questions are like the Parallel Postulate question.[6] Assuming that, say, set-theoretic pluralism is true, there is no *non-semantic* question to ask about, e.g., the Continuum Hypothesis.[7] It is true of some universes, false of others, and that is all there is to it.

> [Pluralists] solve the [epistemological] problem by articulating views on which though mathematical objects are mind-independent, any view we had had of them would have been correct... [T]hese views allow for...knowledge in mathematics, and unlike more standard Platonist views, they seem to give an intelligible explanation of it.

Note that I am intentionally obscuring the metasemantics of pluralism, which is irrelevant to the basic point. For details, see Clarke-Doane [Forthcoming B, Section 6.1 & 6.2].

[5] Though one should not be if one is a modal pluralist! See, again, my [Forthcoming A] and [Forthcoming C].
[6] One can phrase this: "if pluralism turns out to be true", on analogy with "if water turns out not to be composed of H20". (Thanks to Gideon Rosen for pointing this out.)
[7] Assuming that ZF is consistent.

While we could always ask the question of how we happen to be using "is a member of" on an occasion (or what is "packed into" the concept of membership we happen to be invoking), this question is of no *set-theoretic* interest. An answer to it puts no constraints on what sets -- or, more carefully, set-like things -- exist. A similar point applies to the question of whether you could have had different parents, whether the grounding relation is transitive, and whether everything follows from a contradiction, assuming pluralism about modality, grounding, and logic. So, pluralism about an area has a practical upshot. If set-theoretic, modal, logical, or grounding pluralism is true, then influential research programs are misconceived.

Note that I have been discussing pluralism about intuitively descriptive areas, like set theory. But pluralism about normative areas, such as morality or epistemology, may be even easier to defend. Whereas set theory is ontologically committed to controversial objects -- sets -- morality is merely committed to properties. It is *about* uncontroversially existing objects like you and me. But properties come "cheaply" on a wide variety of conceptions, both platonist and nominalist. On a standard platonist conception, there is a property for every predicate,[8] and on a Quinean nominalist conception, whether a property "exists" is just the question of whether to accept a predicate as primitive in our regimented theory of the world (Quine [1948]). Nor is there any question about the instantiation of normative-like properties, given that they, too, would supervene on uncontroversial properties. So, it is hard to see how one could deny the existence, or even instantiation, of normative-like properties, given that normative properties exist and are instantiated.

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[8] Barring those precluded by Russell's Paradox, and related arguments. See, e.g., Bealier [1982].

However, the normative case presents a puzzle. Suppose that, say, *moral pluralism* turns out to be true. There are a plurality of moral-like concepts, all equally satisfied, independent of human minds and languages. Is the question of whether, e.g., we ought to kill the one to save the five *itself* like the Parallel Postulate question?[9] The question of whether we *ought* to, realistically construed, apparently is. That is one way of stating the upshot of Horgans' and Timmons' Moral Twin Earth thought experiment (Horgans and Timmons [1992]). If we are Cornell Realists, for example, then we should agree that along with goodness, which, according to us, is the property causally regulating our use of "good", there is goodness* which could causally regulate another community's use of "good" while giving intuitively opposite verdicts on moral questions. Its verdicts stand to the negation of the Parallel Postulate as our answers stand to the Parallel Postulate.[10] But, evidently, there is a remaining question in the moral case that is closely related to the original. Morality is supposed to tell us what to do, and the question remains whether to do what we ought to do, or ought* to do. There is no analogous question in the vicinity of the Parallel Postulate question, once it is given that it is true of lines$_{Euclidean}$ and false of lines$_{Hyperbolic}$. (There is, of course, the question of whether we *ought* to use lines$_{Euclidean}$ rather than lines$_{Hyperbolic}$. But that question is itself normative, and not about geometrical reality.) What could the remaining question be?[11]

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[9] For concreteness, we can let the question be whether we ought to kill the one to save the five in some fully specified situation -- rather than whether we ought to in general. (Thanks to Carol Rovane for pressing me to make this explicit.)

[10] I say "intuitively" because it strictly gives verdicts on moral* questions, just as hyperbolic geometry gives verdicts on strictly different questions from Euclidean geometry.

[11] Eklund also considers a "further question" in connection with a similar puzzle in his [2017]. I will return to Eklund's discussion shortly.

Elusive Questions

It might be thought that it is the question of which of ought-to-be-doneness or

ought-to-be-doneness* is *genuine* ought-to-be-doneness. But that cannot be right. Trivially,

ought-to-be-doneness is genuine ought-to-be-doneness, simply because "ought" means ought!

Of course, we could ask which of ought-to-be-doneness$_1$ and ought-to-be-doneness$_2$ is

ought-to-be-doneness, where "ought-to-be-doneness$_1$" and "ought-to-be-doneness$_2$"

independently specify the candidates in question. But that is just the semantically descended

version of the question of what "ought" means out of our mouths. An analogous question

remains in any of the prior cases, including (pure) geometry. No one would waste their time

wondering which of the points$_{Euclidean}$ or points$_{Hyperbolic}$ are the *genuine* points. Again, that is why

even mathematical platonists just *stipulate* that by "points" they will mean, e.g., Euclidean

points. Whatever our remaining question, an omniscient semanticist could not resolve it by

merely confirming that "ought" means, say, ought$_1$ out of our mouths. Intuitively, our question is

precisely whether we should be regulating our behavior by consulting the property that we are

actually consulting.

Perhaps, then, the remaining question is another normative question, but not a moral one *per se*.

Maybe it is whether we have *all-things-considered reason* to kill the one, whether we

prudentially should, or whether we are *epistemically justified* in believing that we ought. Maybe

it is even something as baroque as whether we *ought to use our concept of ought*. But even if

such questions do remain, that cannot be the end of the story. A similar puzzle arises assuming

pluralism about *any normative concept*.[12] Suppose, for example, that there are a plurality of all-things-considered-like concepts, all equally satisfied relevantly independent of human minds and languages. Then, even under the assumption that you have all-things-considered reason to kill the one to save the five, we can stipulatively introduce a reason-like concept, reason*, such that you lack all-things-considered reason* to kill the one to save the five. And the question arises whether to do what you have all-things-considered reason, or all-things-considered reason*, to do..

Maybe the question is metaphysical. It is whether our moral-like concepts are "elite" or "carve at the joints" in the sense of Sider [2011] (Enoch and McPhereson [2017]). But this still cannot be right. First, joint carving in any familiar sense is not *morally* relevant. As Eklund writes,

> Suppose...that by eliteness one means something like what is sometimes called *Lewisian* eliteness: the perfectly elite properties are the fundamental physical properties, and something is more elite than something else the closer to this ideal it is….To take this to be relevant to which community objectively has the aesthetically better taste would clearly be unwarranted….[T]he same goes for other normative disputes, including, for example, moral disputes….The general take-home message is this: *even if what is more elite in the Lewisian sense may in some way be metaphysically privileged, it is not relevant so far as normativity...is concerned* [2017, 30, italics in original].

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[12] Actually, barring vagueness and indeterminacy, I believe that this "immunity to deflation" affords a *criterion* for being a normative claim. But I cannot argue for this here.

Of course, we could always *define* a notion of "moral eliteness" such that our remaining question is which moral-like properties are so elite (van Roojen [2006, 180–1]). But that would make the proposal contentless. Second, if the fact that our moral-like concepts are "elite" implies that we *ought* to use them, then eliteness is itself an normative notion. But then the puzzle simply re-arises vis a vis the question of what properties are elite (Dasgupta [2018]) (since, again, an analogous puzzle arises assuming pluralism about all normative concepts). Finally, it was built into the thought experiment that our normative-like concepts are *not* elite. Given Cornell Realism, for example, our moral-like concepts are not *metaphysically* special.[13] The problem is to say what question remains if there are a plurality of moral-like concepts, all on a metaphysical par.[14]

Maybe a more radical conception of the remaining question is called for. Perhaps there remains a question of fact, but it is ineffable (Eklund [2017]).[15] Of course, one may have doubts about the coherence of the notion of an ineffable fact. However, even supposing that the notion is in good order, this account of the remaining question fails as well. Let us call the ineffable propositions whose truth we ponder *moral**. (If the proposal is coherent, then we must be able to *refer* to them, even if we cannot express them.[16]) Then there are two ways in which moral* propositions could be ineffable. First, they could be structurally ineffable in the sense of Hofweber [2017]. Their ineffability could be due to their failure to share anything like sentential

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[13] Cornell Realism is not peculiar in this regard. Another naturalist view with the same consequence is Jackson [1998]. A non-naturalist view with the consequence is Huemer [2005].

[14] It does not matter whether we take eliteness to characterize concepts or the properties to which they correspond. So, I speak of elite properties for convenience.

[15] The question that Eklund probes is not the same as the present one. But some of the answers to it that he proffers might be answers to the present one.

[16] This means that the relevant sense of "express" (or, alternatively, "proposition" and "property") must be fine-grained. If 'P is true' expresses the same proposition as 'P' then we can express any proposition to which we can refer.

structure. But, if this were so, then it would be impossible to explain the connection between our

linguistic behavior with moral sentences and the moral* propositions we ponder. If you utter S

and I reply ~S, where S is a moral sentence, then we should at least be able to conclude that the

moral* propositions that we believe are inconsistent (even if they are not expressed by the

sentences, S, and ~S). But if moral* propositions are structurally ineffable, then we do not even

know whether "consistency" *makes sense* as applied to them -- since we do not know whether

there is any operation on them corresponding to sentential negation. So, it is more promising to

suggest that moral* propositions are ineffable because, while they share sentential structure,

moral* *properties* are ineffable. If this is why moral* propositions are ineffable, however, then

we would seem to be able to simply reformulate pluralism and bypass talk of sentences. Let us

take *moral* pluralism* to be the view that there are a plurality of moral*-like properties, all

equally instantiated.[17] Then even assuming that moral* pluralism is true, a pressing question in

the vicinity of our original question persists.

What to Do and What we Ought to Do

Is there some other account of what the remaining question could be, after it is granted that we

ought to kill the one, but ought* not, and all ought-like concepts are on a metaphysical par?

There is one such account. The remaining question could be the "non-cognitive" question of

what to do, in roughly the sense of Gibbard [2003].[18] We may have no doubt about what we

ought to to, what is the thing to do, what is good to do, what we are obligated to do, and so on for

any normative concepts you like, while still wondering what *to do*. This is because we may

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[17] This is, in fact, the analog to Balaguer's preferred formulation of mathematical pluralism which operates at the level of propositions and properties, not sentences.
[18] See Risberg [Manuscript] for a similar view vis a vis a related puzzle.

wonder whether to do what we ought, rather than ought*, to do, for some alternative normative-like concept, ought*.

We can think of the point in terms of the logical law of weakening. This says that if a conclusion, C, follows from premise A, then C certainly follows from premises A and B. Now suppose that we have no doubt that, say, we ought to kill the one in our present circumstance. This cannot settle the question of whether to kill the one, by weakening. For we can stipulatively introduce an ought-like concept, ought*, according to which we ought* not kill the one in our present circumstance. And given the premises that we ought to kill the one, and ought* not kill the one, the question arises whether to do what we ought, or ought*, to do. Since the fact that we ought to kill the one in our present circumstance does not settle the question of whether to kill the one *in tandem with* the premise that we ought* not kill the one in that circumstance, it cannot settle the question of whether to kill the one on its own, by "weakening". (I put "weakening" in quotes because the conclusion at issue not a proposition, so the logical law does not strictly apply. More on this in a moment.) Settling the facts, *even the normative facts*, fails to settle the questions at the center of our normative lives.

This conclusion is a kind of radicalization of Moore's Open Question Thesis. Moore [1903, Sec. 13] can be read as arguing that a conceptually competent agent may know that A is F, for any *descriptive* property, F, while failing to "endorse" A in the sense that is characteristic of practical deliberation. The above conclusion is that such an agent may know that A is F, for any property,

F, descriptive *or normative*, while failing to endorse A. Blackburn makes such a connection when he writes,

> [I]f we supposed that belief, denial, and so on were simply discussions of a way the world is, we would still face the open question. Even if that belief were settled, there would still be issues of what importance to give it, what to do, and all the rest….For any fact, there is a question of what to do about it. But normative discussion just is discussion of what to do about things [1998, 70].

Of course, any externalist will agree that an agent may know that she ought to kill the one to save the five while failing to be *motivated* to. The point is that our *deliberation as to whether* to kill the one is not yet completed even once we conclude that we *ought* to, that it is the *thing to do*, that it would be *good*, that we have *reason* to, and so on, *for any normative properties whatever*.

It might be countered that this misunderstands the upshot of the puzzle. What the puzzle really shows is that the remaining question is not an normative one, *realistically construed.* It does not show that the question is non-cognitive.[19] It could be, for example, that the remaining question is a moral question, construed as a constructivist construes it. Constructivists themselves emphasize the practical irrelevance of the moral realist's facts (Korsgaard [1996, 44], Street [2006, 138-9]). But anti-realist cognitivists are no better positioned to resolve the puzzle. A Korsgaardian constructivist, for instance, takes the claim that we ought to kill the one to save the

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[19] Thanks to Katja Vogt for raising an objection along these lines.

five to amount, roughly, to the claim that this follows from our "practical point of view". And, yet, just as we can wonder whether to do what we ought, as opposed to ought*, to do, realistically construed, we can wonder whether to do what follows from our practical, rather than practical*, point of view. We can wonder, as Enoch [2006] puts it, whether to be an agent or a shmagent.[20]

The problem is general. Suppose that the remaining question is a question of fact. Then either it is descriptive or normative. But it cannot be descriptive, on account of Moore's original Open Question Argument. So, it must be normative. But if it is normative, then it ascribes some normative property, P, and the new problem arises that we can always wonder whether to act in accord with the P-truths, rather than the P*-truths, for some P-like property, P*.[21] So, the question is not one of normative fact either. It follows that the remaining question is not a question of fact.

It might be objected that an analogous argument could just as well show that the remaining question is not even the non-cognitive question of what to do. Suppose that pluralism about *what to do* turns out to be true. Then it might be argued that there would *still* be a remaining question in the vicinity of whether we ought to kill the one to save the five! But pluralism about

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[20] Dasgupta [2018] seems to miss this when he suggests that the problem he discusses could be solved by endorsing an anti-realist conception of metaphysical privilege, on analogy with Sharon Street's Humean constructivist conception of value.

[21] This is a slight simplification. The questions could use primitive normative operators, in which case no properties are ascribed. But an analogous problem would arise. If O is such an operator, then we can wonder whether to act in accord with the O-truths, as opposed to the O*-truths, for some O-like concept, O*. (I speak of properties, rather than concepts, so as to allow that the truths are ineffable. To allow for this possibility in the case of operators, one would have to speak of their semantic values, whatever they are.)

what to do is unintelligible. The reason, however, is not that there are "what-to-do" facts that are so objective that one cannot even *assume* pluralism about them. The reason is that we can only do *one thing*.[22]

Realism and Objectivity Revisited

Let us call questions of what to do, as opposed to questions of what we ought to do, what would be good to do, and so on *practical*. Then while the conclusion that practical questions are not settled by the facts would traditionally be taken to show that they are not objective, we can now see how misleading this is. Practical questions are highly objective in the sense in which austere relativists say they are not. We cannot answer them by disambiguating different notions of ought. Nor can we resolve practical disputes by saying "you take good_moral and I will take good_moral*". Only one answer to a practical question is possible, simply because coordinated action requires that we do exactly one thing. And while such questions do not answer to the facts, this is part of the reason *why* their objectivity is robust. If they did answer to the facts, then their objectivity would be hostage to how plentiful the facts turned out to be. So, objectivity does not entail realism.

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[22] Thanks to Jennifer McDonald for suggesting this way of putting the point. It might be suggested that moral pluralism is likewise unintelligible. But, as already indicated, it is hard to imagine an argument for this. First, all manner of *actual metaethical theories*, both naturalist and non-naturalist, have pluralist implications. These includes Jackson's functionalism, Boyd's Cornell Realism, and Huemer's platonism. Second, on any account of property existence of which I am aware, there exist moral-like properties if there exist moral ones. And once it is granted that a given property exists, its instantiation conditions are fixed by its identity conditions. Finally, to the extent that moral pluralism appears less comprehensible than pluralism about paradigmatically descriptive areas, this is easily explained from the present point of view. The explanation is that Gibbard is right about natural language semantics.

In the other direction, if realism is true of mathematics, modality, logic, grounding, and so forth, then paradigmatic questions from these areas may all be like the Parallel Postulate question. We may answer them by noting that it is, say, logically possible that you could have had different parents, metaphysically impossible that you could have, and that is all there is to it -- just as we can say that the Parallel Postulate is true of lines_Euclidean, false of lines_hyperbolic, and that is all there is to it. It is *as though* the most austere modal relativism were true. And while such questions *do* answer to the facts, that is *why* their objectivity is compromised when the facts are abundant. The upshot is that realism does not entail objectivity either. Indeed, the concepts are in tension.

If practical questions are objective in a sense that the aforementioned descriptive questions are not, then a new problem of safety arises. Where we might have worried that we could have easily had false normative beliefs, we can now worry that we could have easily had normative*, rather than normative, ones. Had we had normative* beliefs, our beliefs may not have been *false*. (They may have been true of the normative* facts.) But, from our present perspective, they would have given us wrong direction on the practical question of what to do. Eklund considers the following scenario.

> Suppose, as the realist about metaethics typically wants to hold, that our normative predicates are objectively true of some things, so there are facts to the effect that so-and-so is good, such-and-such is right, etc. Here is a way in which this is not sufficient for the realist's purposes. Suppose these predicates are true of some things as supposed, but that the following is how they have obtained their meaning. Some

powerful group in society introduced "right" (say) to stand for a given property P such

that the members of this group perceived it to be in their interest that the rest of the

people in society promote what is P, and to present P in a positive light. Then so long as

there are objective facts about what is P there are objective facts about what is right. But

considerations about what is right don't have the action-guiding significance we assumed

them to have [Manuscript, Sec. 4].[23]

Eklund suggests that this shows that "A challenge like Clarke-Doane's does not seem to have to

proceed via the envisaged normative pluralism" [Manuscript, Sec. 4]. But I disagree. If one

could really convince one's self that there is no coherent possibility of latching onto the "wrong"

normative-like properties, then the right response to Eklund's thought experiment would be

gratitude that the powerful group's stipulations fortuitously answered what to do questions.

What the "translation scheme" above seems to show is that the tension between objectivity and

our claim to knowledge is relocated to the level of action in the case of practical inquiry.

However, while the former problem is widely supposed to be the normative realist's alone, the

latter is all of ours.

Conclusions

I have advocated pluralism -- i.e., realist anti-objectivism -- about domains like set theory,

modality, logic, essence, and grounding. This is the view that questions central to these domains

are analogous to the Parallel Postulate question, realistically construed. The advantage to

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[23] Eklund [Manuscript] is a commentary on my [2015]. Eklund himself presents a related challenge in his [2012] and especially [2017]. Note that Eklund does not use "objective" in the way that I use it in this paper. (Eklund asked me to flag that his [Manuscript] is a work in progress and is subject to change.)

pluralism is that it affords an explanation of how our beliefs from these areas are safe, even though they answer to (presumably causally inert) mind-and-language independent facts. However, pluralism has deflationary methodological ramifications. It says that *for practical purposes* relativism is true.

The question arises whether pluralism about normative areas, like morality and epistemology, is also viable. I have argued that while it is, pluralism about the practical subject of what to do is not so much as intelligible. This means that practical realism *must* be false. It also means that a new problem of safety arises. We could have easily had normative*, rather than normative, beliefs -- even if we could not have easily had false normative-like beliefs.

There are two additional upshots. The first is that, although realism has dominated metaphysical discussions for decades, it is really the concept of objectivity that has pressing methodological ramifications. If set-theoretic pluralism is true, then *for practical purposes* it is as though the most austere relativism is. This is despite the fact that, on a traditional taxonomy, set-theoretic pluralism is a realist position. After all, the (realist) pluralist agrees with the (antirealist) Carnapian that "before us lies the boundless ocean of unlimited possibilities [1937/2001, XV]." By contrast, while realism is false of practical domains, it is *as though* the most extreme form of objectivism is true. We can only do one thing, and this truism means that "before us lies" only one possibility.

The second upshot is that standard methodology in normative philosophy deserves renewed

scrutiny. A common practice (illustrated in, e.g., Cuneo and Shafer-Landau [2014]) is to arrive

at normative conclusions by appeal, at least in part, to our normative concepts. We consider

counterfactual cases, and ask what we would "say". However, if the arguments here are

compelling, then relying on the concepts we happen to have inherited is no less conservative than

relying on the normative beliefs we happen to have inherited.[24] Even if "conceptual surgery"

reveals that our concept of responsibility entails retribution, for example, whether to retribute is

left open. There is a responsibility-like concept, responsibility*, such that responsibility* does

not. And the practical question remains whether to hold people responsible or responsible*. For

any normative concepts, we can "critique...the value of these values" [Nietzsche 1887, Preface,

Sec. 6].

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[24] Eklund also discusses the "conservativeness" of relying on our actual normative concepts in his [2017].

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